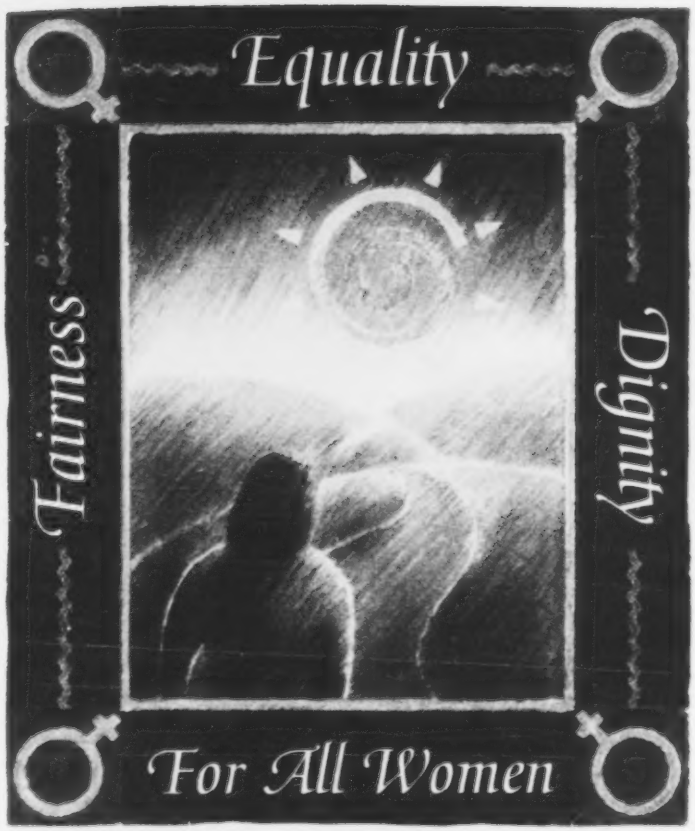
Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
The Status of Women

Conseil consultatif sur la
condition féminine de la
Nouvelle-Écosse

An agency of the Province of Nova Scotia

**A PRESENTATION TO
THE PARLIAMENTARY
STANDING COMMITTEE
ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

February 11, 2003.



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The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women was established by provincial statute in 1977. The Council's mandate under the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act is to advise the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women; and to bring forward the concerns of women in Nova Scotia.

The Council's work touches on all areas of women's lives, including...

- ♀ family life
- ♀ economics
- ♀ education
- ♀ health
- ♀ legal rights
- ♀ paid and unpaid work
- ♀ sexuality
- ♀ violence

Council pays close attention to the experiences of women who face barriers to full equality because of race, age, language, class, ethnicity, religion, ableness, sexual orientation, or various forms of family status.

We are committed to voicing women's concerns to government and the community through policy research, information services and community development. Working cooperatively with women and equality seeking organizations, our mission is to advance equality, fairness and dignity for all women.

IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT PROGRAMS:
ISSUES FACING WOMEN IN NOVA SCOTIA

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, I am pleased to present these remarks about Immigrant Settlement Programs in Nova Scotia in relation to the issues facing immigrant women. The mandate of the Council is to bring forward to government issues of interest and concern to women and to advise government on matters related to the status of women. Since it was formed in 1977, the Council has worked with all levels of government, women's groups, and other organizations on a wide range of issues affecting women relating to family law, economic security, sexuality, health, education, paid and unpaid work and family violence.

The nature of immigration has changed dramatically in the last 25 years. More immigrants face greater challenges in terms of employment, 2nd language acquisition, integration and cultural adjustment. Nova Scotia has lower levels of immigration than many of the other provinces in central and western Canada, but as in other provinces, there has been a shift in immigration patterns over the years. Most immigrants to Nova Scotia now come from Asia, and mostly from west central Asia and the middle east. As Martin Papillon noted in a paper for the Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN), immigration is important for the future of Canada and is one of our greatest assets in terms of both human resources and what he calls "cultural capital"–the cultural mix which is a source of creativity and innovation. But at the same time the increasing diversity of the immigrant population presents new challenges for us as a nation and for immigrants themselves. This is especially true in relation to the provision of immigrant settlement services in general, but in particular in relation to serving the needs of women.

1. **Expectations and the use of Immigration Consultants:** Increased challenges related to settlement by new immigrants may also be linked to an increased reliance on immigrant consultants in some countries of emigration where communities largely rely on private consultants in the country of origin to facilitate the immigration process. We are informed that these consultants do not always provide realistic advice to prospective immigrants about their prospects, the resources they need, or what they might expect when they arrive in Canada.

   We recommend that there be a certification process and more monitoring of private immigration consultants abroad to ensure that they are providing accurate information and advice.

2. **Nova Scotia and Immigrant Settlement Services:** Nova Scotia wants to attract and retain more immigrants but there are difficulties in doing so, in part because of the low level of settlement services. New arrivals often face more challenges than in the past, yet there is less money for settlement support in Nova Scotia. This is because there are problems with the overall scope of settlement services and the amount of money provided by the federal government for settlement and with the current funding formula which we believe is flawed. The allocation for settlement services is based on previous immigration levels using a three year rolling average formula. Since Nova Scotia's immigration levels have declined in recent year, the funding to N.S. agencies has declined by 10% each year for the last few years. But this ends up being a 'chicken and egg' situation. If you cannot offer the services, immigrants are reluctant to come or are unable to settle. In these circumstances, the word gets back to the countries of emigration and others interested in immigration are likely to look for other locations. Under the current formula the only way resources could increase would be through higher immigrant intake, but without more settlement resources, there would be increasing difficulties for settlement agencies. This would be a disservice to immigrants.

   We recommend an immediate freeze on any further reductions to settlement funding and consultations with the province and the settlement agencies to develop a more equitable formula for provinces with lower than average immigration.

3. **Particular Issues of Concern for Immigrant Women:** Immigrant women face many common challenges when they arrive in Canada such as the effects of racism, language acquisition, and recognition of foreign credentials. The issue of the provision of settlement services is of concern in relation to these issues, but it is also of concern in relation to the particular concerns of women. Immigrant women, however, are not an homogeneous group and conditions and adjustment challenges vary depending on the circumstances of the immigrant herself, her family and cultural background, and her education and skills. Women who immigrate as individuals or as dependent family members often face particular difficulties and challenges in terms of employment or language acquisition. The provision of services often do not take into account the difficulties of meeting language learning time-lines created by women's care-giving responsibilities. Those who arrive as sponsored "family class" immigrants or as sponsored refugees can be in a particularly vulnerable position because of their financial dependency on others. Despite these differences in conditions and circumstances of immigration, however, there is often not enough support for female immigrants and their families. Cultural adjustment, language training, employment services are important, if currently inadequate, components of settlement services, but more needs to be done in the areas of access to affordable housing, and support for women with children.

Financial dependency: Women who come as dependents of "independent" class immigrants or as sponsored "family class" immigrants often find they are more financially dependent on their spouse after they immigrate because they have come to Canada in the context of decisions based on improving the economic viability of the family or of opportunities for their husbands rather than for themselves. Women with children who were financially dependent on their husband before arrival may find that the financial situation of the family has changed for the worse, rather than for the better after coming to Canada because her spouse faces unforeseen problems finding employment or establishing a business. In some cases, when the money runs out, the husband must return to the country of origin to earn money, leaving his wife and children to cope as best they can here. We understand that in some cultures, if there is an older male child present, he will be made responsible for family decisions, including finances. This makes issues related to financial dependency all the more problematic. For all of these reasons women coming as dependents may face more settlement challenges than their spouses in terms of finding viable employment, cultural adjustment and language acquisition. This situation can be made worse if the financial situation of the family is strained. Recent research conducted by MISA, for example, demonstrated that these women in particular may be especially vulnerable to social isolation and various forms of abuse, yet there are no special services for them. This is only one of many other specific challenges women face related to settlement and cultural adjustment.

There must be adequate support and counseling services which go beyond language acquisition, which are both culturally and gender sensitive to help women to cope in these situations.

Employment: Whether women come as independent immigrants as dependent family members or as sponsored immigrants they and their families face challenges related to employment and income. In some cases the economic circumstances of immigrants can be fragile and they may move back to the country of origin to earn money temporarily, move back permanently, or move on to other locations in Canada in the hope that things might be better there. For those immigrants who enter under the business class and intending to establish businesses here, there are difficulties in doing so in part because of bureaucratic and cultural challenges here but also because the quality of advice many immigrants receive in the country of origin and once they arrive may be questionable. The recognition of foreign credentials has been flagged as an important issue which needs to be addressed if immigrants are to create a decent life in Canada. New immigrants also need more opportunities to develop and translate their skills in the context of the Canadian labour market. We understand, however that very little beyond employment counseling and job search skills is provided to help immigrants find employment under the settlement program and that HRDC has not been forthcoming with other kinds of employment development services immigrants need.

We recommend that the federal and provincial governments take immediate action on the issue of recognizing foreign credentials; that business class immigrants be provided with realistic and accurate advice about establishing business in Canada; and that the Canadian government through HRDC take more responsibility for helping immigrants to translate and develop their skills into the Canadian labour market context as well as to gain on the job experience in Canada.

Language acquisition and cultural adjustment:
Women are now eligible for second language learning, whether they come as independent immigrants, as family members, or as sponsored family class immigrants. However the time lines for the provision of language training do not take into account women's care-giving responsibilities. While second language acquisition is an important part of cultural adjustment, cultural adjustment must be seen as broader than second language acquisition. Many language schools try to address the specific cultural and gender issues faced by women, but they often meet bureaucratic and funding barriers. We recently heard, for example, of a language school in Bedford which was forced to close because of funding difficulties. This language school brought together immigrant women with pre-school children–mostly from middle eastern countries–into a safe environment of mutual support and learning. Without this support service, many of these women now face social isolation and issues related to cultural integration. As mothers, for example, they often find it difficult to communicate with the schools attended by their children. In some instances have become vulnerable to financial, psychological or even physical abuse which they are reluctant, for cultural and other reasons, to bring to the attention of the authorities.

We recommend that cultural and gender specific issues faced by immigrant women be taken into account in the funding and delivery of settlement services in Canada.

4. **Women Newcomers Who Are Outside the Immigration System:** Finally, we wish to bring to your attention the issues and concerns of those who fall outside the official immigration process–non-sponsored refugees and wives of students coming to Canada to study. These women face similar situations as those discussed above, but because they are not officially "immigrants", there are limited or no support services available. Nevertheless, non-sponsored immigrants and students who come on work on student visas often stay in Canada for long periods or, in the case of students they often want to return as immigrants later. If Canada is in the business of attracting immigrants and really wants to foster integration and cultural adjustment, it makes sense to include this population inside a net of services for newcomers, whatever their "official" status.

We recommend that consideration be given to broadening the scope of immigrant settlement services to include provision of services for all newcomers, including refugees and students.